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Volunteerism Keeps Laguna de Santa Rosa Flourishing in Rohnert Park and Cotati

Cotati Creek Critters, a nature restoration and nonprofit, is trying to bring the laguna back to a more natural state.

By [Angela Hart](#) | [Email the author](#) | March 13, 2011

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Over the past five years, environmental activists and volunteers have planted a [mile-long stretch](#) of riparian stretch of the [Laguna de Santa Rosa](#) — and on March 11, about 30 people showed up to continue restoration. [Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

"I work out here every month; it's an important part of maintaining natural habitats," said Chirelle McCorley, State and the eco-projects coordinator for [Join Us Making Progress](#), a student-led volunteer organization

"This is what I want to do when I get older, and it helps me connect with the community," McCorley said.

That's the idea behind [Cotati Creek Critters](#), a local nonprofit that organizes the volunteer workdays, to pr it to a more natural state.

The Laguna, a 14-mile channel that starts in Cotati and enters the Russian River north of Forestville, includ marshes, still water pools, grasslands and forests, that provide a patchwork of niche habitats for migratory biodiversity, according to environmental groups. The tributary to the Russian River also acts as a buffer du agriculture and urban runoff and cools water for fish and other aquatic organisms.

But Cotati's section of the laguna wasn't always that way. Until a few years ago, the creek was just about g the area was mowed and sprayed with herbicides, said Wade Belew, the stewardship coordinator for Cotat That led to the disappearance bird, fish and plant species once abundant in the area.

Then, in 2005, the organization received a grant from the [California Department of Water Resources](#) to l the creek beds and slopes are filled with native plants, such as California buckeye, big leaf maple, oaks, cc "This used to be a series of channels, shifting and meandering down from the mountains," said Jenny Blak Critters. "It'll never fully return to its natural state, but it's important to restore the area's biological functions erosion."

On a nearby slope, volunteer Tom Webb pruned trees and laid mulch around existing plants. Webb has be "I moved here from San Diego in 2001 for college, and this really helped me feel like part of the community back and doing something good for the environment."

Webb went on to major in natural resources management, and he now works for the California State Park : "Doing this has helped me get every job I've had," Webb said.

Nicole Jaco, 20, a student at Santa Rosa Junior College and Raina Phillips, 17, a junior at Maria Carillo, w mulching and pulling weeds.

"I didn't even know what native plants were before today," Jaco said.

"We're definitely learning a lot," Phillips said.

It's important work, volunteers said, because the tree canopy will increase the shade on the creek, and the banks.

"It's important to keep the water temperature down, because as it goes up, the dissolved oxygen in the wat the fish."

Editor's note: The organization has planted about 2,000 over the last few years. Organizers said they're no plantings by weeding, mulching, pruning, etc.

According to the organization's website, the "Cotati Creek Critters, working with the support of the [Laguna](#) ed in the Sonoma County Water Agency, has been sponsoring volunteer creek restoration efforts since 199. Streams Restoration Grant from the California Department of Water Resources in 2005." [Terms of Service](#) [Privacy P](#) ws, events, and deals, delivered straight to you.

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